

## NAPOLEON I AND THE ISRAELITES

This new volume brings to light, and shows in detail, the organization of Jewish preponderance: it follows on from the one that recounted its origins.

This organization is not merely, as many believe, a learned concentration of Hebraic forces: it includes among its elements the very lifeblood of the hospitable nation. It developed, aided by events, institutions, laws and customs. Events were favorable; mores soon offered little resistance; laws and institutions lent themselves to its roots.

Moreover, it grows from the decadence of others:

The magnificent rise of the Christian nations was compared by the Royal Prophet to the majesty of great waters. These majestic waters, flowing at full tide, passed victoriously over a rock, transformed into a reef by the Talmud: it was the Jewish people, enclosed in their bosom. But the day the waters became low, the laws, institutions and mores weakened, the rock emerged to become a peak, a summit, a preponderance.

Such a state of affairs is difficult to explain unless we take the trouble to go back to the Empire, the successor to the French Revolution. To the Constituent Assembly, from 1789 to 1791, Jewish preponderance was indebted for its origin; to Napoleon, from 1806 to 1815, it was indebted for its organization.

This vast genius, with his conservative and generous intentions, was largely mistaken in his measures towards the Jewish people. He believed that his laws and institutions would fortify society and dissolve the Hebrews, and the opposite was to happen. Finally, when the battle broke out between the mighty Emperor and the living debris of Sinai, it was the debris that resisted, and triumphed.

These various twists and turns make up a little-known episode of the Empire, and one of the greatest interest. We tell the story. May the reader, whoever he or she may be, bear us witness to this: how dear truth is to us, and, no less, charity! Our task is a difficult one. But in coming to the defense of the Christian people, and, following God's example, taking the side of Isaac against Ishmael, we are not forgetting the gentleness that can help make reconciliation possible. Don't both peoples belong to God's Christ, one as a child, the other as an ancestor? Napoleon was certainly doing a laudable thing when he worked towards rapprochement: his fault was to have attempted it without the Church. He was attempting the impossible! Only the Church can work underneath the edifice of concord, repairing its breaches and perfecting it. What a happy thing for society when we say: Israelites and other peoples are brothers, not in civil guise, but for real!

May the heavens grant that this historical study, which sheds light on situations by faithfully recounting the good and the bad, also diminishes the distance that separates!

Lyon, March 19, 1891.

## CHAPTER ONE

## HOW NAPOLEON CAME TO DEAL WITH THE ISRAELITES

I . Napoleon's glory did not disdain the Jews. – II The decree of emancipation and equality, issued by the Constituent Assembly in 1791, had in no way improved their lot; nor had it brought the French any closer to them. The Talmud hedge. – III. The chain of circumstances that led Bonaparte to undertake this improvement and rapprochement. His first encounter with the Jews: in Syria. The eastern dream of the conqueror of the Pyramids – IV. Then, he meets them in the wake of his armies, during the Austerlitz campaign: the eagle and the vultures. – V. Third encounter: Strasbourg. Alsace, devoured by them, complains to Napoleon. The leprosy of usury. Conscription evaded. The emperor holds back his irritation. – VI. Back in Paris, he unloads a sword on all the claims of the Jews of Alsace. The Council of State is seized of the Jewish question. Session presided over by the Emperor, where he exhales his irritation. The thought of his glory brings him back to a calm examination of the question. A flash of his genius: convocation of a Jewish Estates General. – VII It's important to be clear about the historical context at the time of these singular Estates General: it's the height of the Empire; Napoleon's image is that of a demigod; what he himself thought of religions.

I

"He loves glory, because everything else cannot fill the immense emptiness of his soul. 11 devours time, he devours space, because he has to live faster, walk faster than other men. He weighs the world in his hand, and finds it light; and with his forehead half bent over the abyss, he begins to dream of the eternity of his dynasty and the universal monarchy\*."

G'est bien Napoléon!

Some people have worshipped the sun; Napoleon worshipped his own glory. It had risen like the sun. Eagle, he stared at it, he drank it in.

He consulted her in all his undertakings, invoked her in his proclamations to his soldiers. He was in love with her, dazzled by her, infatuated with her. He wanted her to shine, to be empress of the world, wrapped in glory: but France's glorious garment was himself, with his victories, his crowns, his name! Her glory had all the characteristics of ancient divinities: it was insatiable, tinged with purple and blood, despotic and terrible.

One day, she encountered the Jewish people.

Her first reaction was, no doubt, disdain and contempt. Did glory have anything to do with these people?

Perhaps it did!

And the Emperor's face must have turned pensive. What a monologue!

Doesn't the sun that shines on the golden dome of the Invalides also have a few rays for the alleys of the Jews? And doesn't the eagle, after soaring high in the heavens, enter the holes of the abyss?

And mounted on the pinnacle, he longs to descend!

From the summit of the Concordat and the handling of thrones, to descend into the affairs of the Jews – what a departure for your genius, O Napoleon!

But isn't there a glory in dashing from one extreme to another, and hasn't it been said that this superb march is that of the Almighty4?

Come on, Napoleon, you won't lose time or prestige by taking care of them!

And his glory, which by 1806 had already focused its rays on so many peoples, began to consider them too.

In this first book, we shall recount his loyal undertaking to correct their morals and reconcile them with

the rest of the world.

## II

The Emperor's enterprise will come as a surprise to anyone who has read our previous work. One might ask: "But hadn't the Constituent Assembly already invited the Israelites to join the common life? Wasn't this invitation made in 1791, with the decree of their emancipation? The year was 1806. Fifteen years have passed. In those fifteen years, has there been no transformation, no rapprochement between the French and the Jews?

History answers: No transformation, no rapprochement.

Indeed, the people were less than eager to open their ranks to the new citizens; and the latter deemed it prudent not to abandon their alleys. We looked at each other from both sides, as if we were made of earthenware! But could it be otherwise? Wasn't it naive to think that people who had been accustomed for centuries to living apart from mainstream society would suddenly abandon their customs and their homes and start living the French way?

However, there are other reasons for this mutual circumspection. What are they?

Events have had a hand in it. We lived through the years of the Terror, everyone confined to their homes as much as possible. We then moved on, without transition or truce, to the battlefields.

Admittedly, there wasn't much time left to get to know each other. Nevertheless, the real cause of circumspection lies elsewhere.

Does it lie in the Law of Moses, which differs in certain respects from the Christian Law? Not precisely.

"Standing at Sinai, Moses listens and writes: he listens and writes a Law from which thirty-three centuries have not removed a syllable, which Athens has received, which Rome venerates, which conscience recognizes as its own, and which Jesus Christ, who came from God to consume all, also declares to be his law. Moses is to Sinai what Adam is to Eden.<sup>1</sup> "

Brothers in Adam, Israelites and Christians will find no difficulty in continuing this brotherhood in the shadow of Moses' Decalogue.

So what keeps them apart?

The hedge of Talmudic laws!

From their private authority, the rabbis have added and added to the Law of Moses, and these heaps of additions have become inextricable jumbled messes: their coming together makes up the Talmud, filled with decisions where the Spirit of God is absent, a jumble of cumbersome things, and ridiculous and interminable subtleties. Didn't the rabbis decorate these additions with the name of hedge to the Law, as if they had received the mission of protecting it! Alas! no better name has ever been found, but with a gloomy meaning. The poor Jews were literally fenced in, imprisoned by this hedge, they who had enjoyed the great avenues of the Bible. Ah, the Talmud is not a bulwark of blossoming hawthorns, but rather a bristling, impenetrable hedge, favorable to snakes, theft and rapine, behind which dangerous decisions have been taken in hatred of Christianity. If not, why would Popes and very Christian Kings have so often ordered the destruction of copies of the Talmud?

Now, - to return to the persistent circumspection of Christians and Jews despite the liberating and fraternal decree of 1791 - it can be explained by the fact that the detestable hedge has been maintained, the undergrowth being as inextricable and as dangerous as ever. People who live in the undergrowth, behind the hedges, are exposed, almost in spite of themselves, to less-than-honorable occupations, like gypsies; so it was with the Jews behind their Talmud, even after the emancipation of 1791; is it any wonder that, for their part, Christians didn't much care to trade with people who had repudiated nothing of their distrust and habits? This is the real cause of mutual circumspection.<sup>2</sup> Israelites, eager for light and rapprochement, were not afraid to admit it, even at this time, and to call for a clearing-up. "In

1800, an association of Dutch Jews published a resolution to recognize only the pure and consoling religion of Moses, and to reject the institutions which, until then, had been called Talmudic laws. This association had many adherents. In 1801, a general congress was planned, to bring together in Lunéville the representatives of all the Jews dispersed in the various states of Europe.<sup>3</sup> This project, which was not accepted by the French government, was a great success.

Bonaparte was to take up this project again. A soldier's boot was, alone, capable of venturing through this undergrowth; and a voice like his was needed to command: Come out of your holes; line up! Let's see you!

But what was the chain of circumstances that led Bonaparte to take this initiative and become involved with the Jewish people? It's important to understand this before delving into the details of the transformation project.

### III

"Here we are, obliged to do great things!" exclaimed Bonaparte on Egyptian soil, on learning that the French fleet had just been completely destroyed by Nelson at Aboukir, and that he was trapped in the East, following the loss of his fleet.

His departure from Toulon, in the spring, under a splendid sky, with a harbor full of spectators, had been full of enthusiasm; but at that moment his plans were still uncertain. The Orient of infinite thoughts was opening up before him. Like the eagle of Lebanon which, from the top of the Sannin, looks at the sun, turns its head towards different points in the sky and for some time hesitates as to the prey its swift flight will reach, the young general-in-chief, from the top of his ship, had wondered whether he would go to relieve Athens or Sparta, attack Constantinople or Cairo, take Aleppo and from there threaten India. His bellicose imagination played with the kingdoms of Asia; he felt within himself something like omnipotence. He would have gladly said to the wind: Push my sail wherever you like, and woe betide any nation that resists my sword! Bonaparte decided to go for the Pyramids. He wanted to measure himself against the granite colossi of Heliopolis or Thebes, to ensure the future grandeur of his stature.<sup>4</sup>

The news of his fleet's destruction did not move him. Turning to his comrades-in-arms, he told them that he had great things to do. He was intoxicated with youth and strength, and determined to perform prodigies. He dreamed of repeating Alexander's conquests, facilitated by the means of modern warfare in lands that had never known them.

The empire of the East really presented itself to his mind,<sup>5</sup> and it was then that he first turned his attention to the Israelites.

The methods he used to deal with them, in the land that was so dear to them, resemble those that his policy and his deism advised him to use towards the sons of Islam, albeit more discreetly. Historians have recounted the advances he made in religion to win the trust of the Arabs. To look after the mosques and their interests with marked care and partiality; to surround the muftis and imans with honors and extraordinary consideration; to speak to them of Mohammed with admiration; to enter into the views and sentiments of Islamism; to attend their festivals, the feast of the Nile, the feast of the Prophet; to see to the sumptuousness of a carpet covered with sentences that Muslim pilgrims had to carry to Mecca : these were the accommodations, not to say captations, of the conqueror of the Pyramids; accommodations unknown to previous conquerors. The old muftis listened to him with rapture. Their eyes sparkled with rays of happiness as he promised them the restoration of the Arab empire, the return of the glorious times of the Fatimites. <sup>6</sup>

The same was true of the Israelites. When, master of Egypt, he undertook the conquest of Syria and

Palestine, he advised his soldiers to respect the synagogues. He caressed the old beards reminiscent of Aaron's, offering them the hope of reviving the Hebrew name. He issued a proclamation in which he invited "all the Jews of Asia and Africa to come and rally under his flags, to restore Jerusalem to its former splendor". 7

But Saint-Jean d'Acre stopped him.<sup>8</sup>

He could only contemplate Palestine from the summit of Tabor, which the Arabs call Gebel-el-Nour, Mountain of Light. This vision left an indelible impression on him. 9

A few days later, he set sail for the West. On the deck of the ship, he was reading the Bible. 10 The East did not see him sail away without regret.<sup>11</sup> For his part, he remained under the spell of "this cradle of the world and of great things". He liked to talk about it on St. Helena. 12 The eternal silence of the Pyramids, interrupted by his cannon, the consideration of the extraordinary duration of the Hebrew people, whose lawgiver Moses was still after having been their guide from the Nile to the Jordan, the keys to Palestine that had escaped him at St. John of Acre – all these things had left something great in his soul. And so, when the time came to settle the destiny of the Israelites, oriental reminiscences made him look down on the question.

His government was the interpreter of this feeling, when, in the famous assembly we report below, it gave the Jewish question this prologue which is not lacking in grandeur: "In dealing with the organization of the various cults, the government has not lost sight of the Jewish religion; it must participate like the others in the freedom decreed by our laws. The government believes it has a duty to respect the eternity of this people, which has come down to us through the revolutions and debris of the centuries, and which, in all that concerns its priesthood and worship, considers it one of its greatest privileges to have only God himself as its lawgiver." 13

So it was in the East that Bonaparte first encountered the sons of Israel.

#### IV

The second meeting took place in Germany, in the wake of the armies, on the evening of the battlefields.

What a contrast there was between him and them: he in all his military glory, they in all their base passions!

It was the eve of the Battle of Austerlitz:

The terrain is favorable to the Russians and Austrians. They occupy a fairly high plateau, around which their battalions spread out. With that marvelous instinct that enabled him to foresee everything in war, Napoleon showed the plateau to his generals, and said: "The Russians will make the mistake of abandoning it: I'll establish myself there, I'll cut their army in two, and they'll be lost without a resource. The Russians attack before daylight. A thick mist covers the vastness of the battlefield. Around eight o'clock, the sun appears in all its glory. Napoleon arrived at full gallop, joyful and superb, like an eagle sizing up its prey. He let the enemy commit part of his forces, offering him only eleven thousand braves, who remained impassive for six hours. Suddenly, with his reserves, Napoleon seized the heights from which the Russians had descended, drove into their center, cut them in two, and forced one of their entire corps to venture onto icy ponds, soon half-opened by cannonballs.

It was the eagle!

But the battle is over, evening has come: from far and wide, the last rumblings of cannon! By the light of torches, the dead are stripped; the torn and bloody effects are quickly estimated in hushed tones: by this estimate, there are Jews.

After the eagle, the vultures!

It's a painful contrast, but it's true; Napoleon himself expressed himself in these bitter terms: "They're

like swarms of crows. We saw them at the battles of Ulm, who had flocked from Strasbourg to buy from the marauders what they had looted.<sup>14</sup> We know that Ulm prepared Austerlitz. The historian who reports these words of the Emperor adds: "Napoleon had strong prejudices against this class of men (the Jews). He had drawn them from the armies, which were all too often followed by Jews greedy for gain and ready to deal in anything." <sup>15</sup>

But, remembering that in their ranks had once appeared the Machabees, the eagle said to himself: Why not try to transform them, and bring them back to their first nature?

## V

Third encounter:

On his way back from Austerlitz, the Emperor stopped in Strasbourg. Immediately, from every corner of Alsace, extremely loud complaints and petitions against the usury of the Jews arrived at the feet of the Emperor.

An ugly but symbolic disease, leprosy, if transferred to the moral sphere, would suffice to prove that the Jews have committed a great sin in the course of their history, one that heaven has not yet forgiven them for. A symbolic disease, we say:

Indeed, Christian doctrine, pointing to its existence in the moral sphere, has rightly named sin and bad morals with this disgusting appellation: the leprosy of sin, the leprosy of misconduct! Yes, indeed, those who live in misbehavior, to whatever religion they belong, are, in the most pure eyes of the Divinity, horrible lepers. But the sons of Israel have become so, alas! in another way: through sordid greed and usurious practices. May they allow and forgive us the following short but necessary correlation:

People looked upon leprosy as an unequivocal sign of heavenly vengeance; its name alone inspired horror – Was it not so with avarice, which became the stigma, the reddish scale of Israel, an unequivocal sign of heavenly vengeance? Judas, you sold Christ for thirty denarii: because of you, your unfortunate brothers have become usurers, the lepers of the world!

In leprosy, the limbs fall to shreds, but most of the time, the patient survives. It seems that this hideous disease has less of a grudge against man's existence than against his forms, and that its triumph consists more in degrading than in destroying. – So it is with usurers: they are degraded and cannot die!

Finally, leprosy is contagious, spreading and devouring: and so is usury! When Napoleon stopped in Strasbourg, Alsace appeared devoured and shredded before him. Here are the reports, or rather the wounds, that were laid out before his eyes:

a) Excessive loans. – In general, Jews demand 1.50 francs a month for the interest on 24 francs, which brings the interest on the sums they lend to 75 percent a year. As the interest is added to the capital in the bills they issue, it is difficult to obtain legal proof of such excessive usury. It is rare that those reduced to the necessity of resorting to the Jews are able to free themselves at the agreed times. On the due date, the Jews do not fail to obtain judgments of condemnation, and they oppose the mortgages. The mass of claims for which they have obtained registrations is frightening: it is said to exceed thirty million. They take great care not to allow interest to accumulate beyond what their debtors' assets can guarantee. When they believe they should no longer grant a term, they proceed with the sale of the assets.

b) Forced expropriations. – The proceeds of forced expropriations amount to around 1,500,000 francs a year in each of the Haut and Bas-Rhin departments, and of this sum the Jews, according to the surveys we have carried out, have about 6/7.

c) Mortgages. – The number of mortgage claims registered at the registry offices, in favor of the Jews, from the beginning of Year VII to January 1, 1806, totals 21,199,826 francs, so that, if none of these

registrations had been purged since Year VII, the Jews of the Haut-Rhin would currently have more than 23,000,000 mortgage claims on property owners in this department.

d) Claims due. - In addition to these mortgage claims, the Jews have 10,000,000 claims due: private bonds, bills of exchange, bearer bills. It should be noted that mortgage claims mainly concern rural property.

e) Land grabbing. - Through the excessive loans they have made to farmers, and the mortgages they have taken out to guarantee these loans, the Jews have vassalized a large part of the land in Alsace. Ownership sometimes passed even more directly into their hands. In 1793, many farmers were forced to leave their homes to escape death. Jews acquired all these abandoned inheritances at a very low price, and when those who owned them returned, speculating on their affections and miseries, they sold them so dearly that, for lack of full payment or by dint of accumulated interest, they soon became owners a second time.<sup>16</sup>

But because usury, like leprosy, is contagious, servants and day laborers came to bring the Jews the price of their services or their days, so that they could sell them as their own money; and notaries seduced by them used their ministry to hide their shameful traffic!<sup>17</sup>

When the Emperor heard all this, he must have had wrinkles in his forehead and lightning in his eyes. But he's in control, he listens, he knows how to listen! So what could he be doing right now? In the past - and this is the last resemblance with lepers, who are isolated by separating them from the general population - Jews were isolated, kept apart in their neighborhoods, veritable leper colonies. But the Constituent Assembly had thrown them into the midst of society, and Napoleon, all-powerful as he is, would never dare to force them back into their alleys, with laws of exception.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, he wanted to tear them out, and shape them in the French style.

Another abuse adds to his wrath. His Majesty was informed of the tricks they used to avoid conscription. Napoleon was stung! What's more, these deceptions were imitated: "Everywhere, false declarations were made at the civil registry office: fathers declared boys born to them as daughters; and mayors tolerated these irregularities, even cooperating if necessary by falsifying civil registries. Of the sixty-six Jews who, within a period of six years, were to form part of the Moselle contingent, not one entered the armies; and in the department of Mont-Tonnerre, until 1806, the Jews constantly evaded the laws of conscription. <sup>19</sup> Their habit of having no patronymic name, and of constantly changing it, singularly favored these deceptions.

That's a good thing. The case is heard. Napoleon promises justice. 11 leaves Strasbourg.

## VI

Napoleon is in Paris.

His first act on the Jewish question is to saber-rattle the claims of the usurers of Alsace. That's how a sincere rabbi put it. "Napoleon, who was not joking, as Talleyrand used to say, unloaded a saber blow on the Judaic claims. "<sup>20</sup> The blow was struck from the palace of Saint-Cloud:

At the Palais de Saint-Cloud, May 30 1806.

On the account given to us... that certain Jews, exercising no other profession than that of usury, have, through the accumulation of the most immoderate interests, placed many farmers in a state of great distress,

We thought we should come to the aid of those of our subjects whom unjust greed had reduced to these unfortunate extremities.

And the decree orders a one-year stay of execution on all judgments and contracts in favor of Jews by non-merchant farmers in several of France's northern departments.

A real sabre-rattling! as we said; nevertheless, the matter of Messieurs les juifs will in no way be sabre-rattled in the rest, i.e. it will be neither rushed nor rudely dispatched: so much the worse! One of the Emperor's favorite tactics when dealing with difficult issues and affairs was to begin with a show of force, to intimidate, soften opposition and suddenly put the odds in his favor; then he proceeded, with sagacity and depth, to examine the affair from every angle.

Indeed, a few days before the violent action at Saint-Cloud, Napoleon had referred the Jewish question to the Conseil d'État, and some very curious incidents had taken place. We report only the main ones, according to the faithful accounts of eyewitnesses.

Mr. Molé, a young, new auditor, had drawn up a report concluding that unfavorable measures should be taken against the Jews, a sort of return to the laws of exception;

Mr. Beugnot, a recently appointed councilor, concluded with measures more in harmony with the liberal ideas of the Conseil d'Etat;

Since agreement and a solution seemed difficult, the Arch-Chancellor, M. Régnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angély, announced on behalf of the Emperor that the discussion would be taken up again before His Majesty, one day when she was presiding over the Council.

The session was held at Saint-Cloud:

M. Beugnot, speaking for the first time before the Emperor, was emphatic, pretentious, declamatory, everything that should not be at the Conseil d'Etat, where the discussion was a businessman's conversation, with no research, no phrases, no need for effect. The Emperor was clearly impatient. Mr. Beugnot called a measure taken by exception against the Jews a battle lost in the fields of justice. When he had finished, the Emperor took the floor, and with a verve and vivacity more marked than usual, he replied to M. Beugnot's speech, sometimes with mockery, sometimes with calm; he spoke against theories, against general and absolute principles, against men for whom facts were nothing and who sacrificed reality to abstractions. He raised with bitterness the unfortunate phrase about the lost battle; and, becoming more and more animated, he came to swear, which, to my knowledge, has never happened to him at the Conseil d'Etat; then he ended by saying: "I know that the auditor who made the first report was not of this opinion, I want to hear him." M. Molé rose and read out his report; M. Régnault de Saint-Jean- d'Angély quite courageously defended the contrary opinion and even M. Beugnot; M. de Ségur also ventured a few words: "I don't see," he said, "what we could do. The Emperor had relented... 21

Three sessions were devoted, in the Emperor's presence, to these preliminaries of the Jewish question. 22 In the first (April 30, 1806), Napoleon uttered the terrible words quoted above: "These are veritable clouds of crows. We saw them at the battle of Ulm, who had flocked from Strasbourg to buy from the marauders what they had looted."

In the second (May 17), he insists on their disastrous role: "... I point out once again that we don't complain about Protestants or Catholics in the same way as we do about Jews; the harm done by Jews comes not from individuals, but from the very constitution of this people: they are caterpillars, locusts ravaging France." Then, a flash of his genius piercing through this vicious constitution, he exclaimed: "We must assemble the Estates General of the Jews; I want there to be a general synagogue of the Jews in Paris." The vision of his glory had returned to him, a calming, transforming vision, because it was still God's vassal; indeed, he adds: "I am far from wishing to do anything against my glory and which might be disapproved of by posterity.... There would be weakness in driving out the Jews; there will be strength in correcting them."



In the third session (May 21), he unloaded the famous saber-rattling we've been talking about: the one-year reprieve imposed on Judaic claims; vehement prologue, notice to the Jewish Estates General that were about to be convened: that docility to the Emperor had to be written, somewhere, in their Bible and Talmud! Moreover, so that the sons of Israel would not be misled as to what to do, the same decree (May 30) announced both the saber-rattling and the convening of these Estates General.

## VII

Before contemplating the singular reunion of the dispersed people of the old centuries, convened, as the decree put it, in the good city of Paris, it is of great importance, in order to appreciate the true value of the words and deeds of this meeting, to recompose in our minds the historical milieu in which it was held. As the reader will have noticed, we are accustomed to recomposing historical environments; it is the essential condition for sincere criticism.

The year is 1806. This year and the next, during which the Israelites summoned from France, Italy and Holland were to find themselves in Paris, marked the apogee of the Empire. Between 1806 and 1807, the Empire presented a dazzling spectacle. Napoleon wore the coronation halo on his forehead: Pius VII had agreed to crown the warrior who had bowed to Christ. Beyond the frontiers, trails of victories, like milky ways, lead to Marengo and Austerlitz. France's preponderance was unrivalled under Richelieu, Henri IV or even Saint Louis. And as for its new sovereign, who can be compared to him? He has single-handedly driven out foreigners like Charles VII, re-established religion like Henri IV, and conquered more power and glory than a long line of forebears and the impetus of a great century had given to Louis XIV. Ireland and Poland look upon him from afar as a liberator. The princes of old Europe trembled before him. At home, a general amnesty for émigrés further enhanced the exploits of the great captain, who at the same time revealed himself to be a consummate statesman: legislation, finance, administration, public works, general security, everything, under his powerful hand, had just changed face, and justified universal enthusiasm. The Emperor, simple and austere to himself, has surrounded himself with a grand entourage and a brilliant court; his marshals and ministers have been rewarded with principalities or dukedoms; his brothers are entering the family of kings. In Paris, the treasury, replenished by the war, offered security and paid for major works; the Austerlitz bridge was built over the Seine; canals were multiplied; Saint-Denis, once again the burial place of the sovereigns, and Sainte-Geneviève, restored to worship, received major developments; The Vendôme column was erected with cannons taken from the enemy; the Carrousel triumphal arch was built, and Napoleon made the celebration of the great army coincide with an exhibition of French industry, associating civil glory with military glory, in keeping with his favorite philosophy.

It was at the moment of the agglomeration of all these splendors that the Jews were summoned to Paris! History has preserved the response of the Doge of Venice, who was obliged to come to Versailles to lay the republic's excuses at the feet of Louis XIV. When asked what had most excited his astonishment in the midst of this sumptuous court, in this palace of Versailles with its royal park, its grandiose avenues and its thousand bubbling fountains, he replied: "To see myself there! All the more reason for the Jews, humiliated pariahs, embarrassed in their contentment, scattered, but also summoned by the great man to learn to become like everyone else, to say to themselves, as they set foot in this sumptuous Paris and look at each other: "What strikes us most is to see ourselves there".

Having noted the apogee of the Empire, it is still necessary, in order to clarify the historical milieu, to answer these two questions: what idea did people have of Napoleon in these years 1806 and 1807; and

what idea did he himself have of his mission in the religious sphere?

France was captivated, and for good reason! His soldiers, accustomed to seeing victory as an article of faith under his command, listened to him with rapt attention, and would listen to no other teaching. In civilian life, the man who sovereignly distributes honors, titles, pensions and kingdoms is the object of such flattery that it can exceed even the master's desires. After Austerlitz, he triumphantly passed through the crowd of petty German princes, and returned to Paris to find unheard-of honors. Artists portrayed him sometimes as a hero, sometimes as a demigod; medals reproduced the adulation of which Louis XIV had been the object. This adulation even crept into the catechism, which imposed love of Napoleon alongside love of God and parents. And what becomes of freedom, transported to the eagles' territory? It has no wings: the fear of this company paralyzes it. And the resistance of spirits? Nil. So the words of the poet Ducis, to whom the Emperor offered a seat in the Senate, are typical: I'm a wild duck, one of those who can smell the rifle from afar. Don't waste your time: I would rather wear rags than chains.

When the timid, supple Hebrews are assembled in Paris, how will they get away with it? It will be a curious spectacle!

But what idea does the Emperor have of himself, and what are his real religious convictions?

Let's not lose sight of the fact that this is 1806, the most brilliant year of the Empire. Napoleon was preoccupied with a single thought, almost a cult: his glory! However, at this date, Napoleon's glory still recognized itself as God's vassal. It has been claimed that, at the height of his reign, he no longer believed himself to be a man, but the invincible, divine hero proclaimed by the poets".<sup>23</sup> This assertion seems wrong to us. Napoleon never banished from his mind the idea of God and Providence.<sup>24</sup> When he made the mistake, and the crime, of attacking the Pope in an attempt to dominate him, he convinced himself, in his delusion, that he was not attacking religion, still less Divinity. What was he, after all? A deist: as much for political reasons as for religious ones. Born to organize, imbued with the idea of order, he understood the importance of religious sentiment in shaping his Empire, and he never wavered from this fixed idea. In his eyes, religion was the sword's companion in subduing men. Because he was born a Catholic, and because the Catholic Church's strong, unified system suits his genius, he prefers it to other religions; but he finds the titles of other religions respectable, and commands respect for them. What he intends is that religions in their public expression, i.e. cults, should come under his authority as benefactor, organizer and sovereign. He wants to hold the various cults in his hand, just as a chariot driver holds the reins of the carriage. This was Napoleon's religious physiognomy in 1806.

The splendor of the Empire at that date, the delirious admiration the Emperor aroused, the role of repairer, arbiter and sovereign he claimed to exercise with regard to and above religions, were never better interpreted and expressed than within the Jewish Assembly that was about to meet. One of the Emperor's commissioners said of his master: "If some personage from past centuries were to return to the light, and such a spectacle were to strike his eyes, would he not believe himself transported to the walls of the holy city, or think that a terrible revolution has renewed human things right down to their foundations? He wouldn't be mistaken, gentlemen: it's at the end of a revolution that threatened to engulf religions, thrones and empires, that altars and thrones are rising up on all sides to protect the earth. A senseless crowd had tried to destroy everything; one man came and repaired it all. The whole world, and the past since its origin, were delivered up to his gaze; he saw scattered over the face of the globe the scattered remains of a nation as famous for its abasement as any people was ever for its greatness. It was right that he should concern himself with its fate, and it was to be expected that these same Jews who hold such a high place in the memories of men, would fix the attention of a prince who must forever fill their memory." <sup>25</sup>

What can we conclude from this chapter? This:

That the Emperor is loyal in the design he has conceived to correct the morals of the Israelites, to incorporate them into his Empire, and to reconcile them with the peoples. We shall examine later whether his undertaking was in every respect political and prudent: it must be acknowledged here that it was loyal. It was not out of affection for the Jews that he undertook this project: he called them "caterpillars and locusts"; nor was it to harm the Catholic religion: the expression he used, "Il faut assembler les Etats généraux des juifs", proves that he excluded any religious parallel; his enterprise had but one aim, in keeping with his genius as a soldier: to bring the Jews into line, to make them follow in his Empire's footsteps. Mme de Staël wrote at the time: "Napoleon regards a human creature as a fact or as a thing, but not as a fellow human being. He hates no more than he loves; there is only him for him; all other creatures are ciphers. This assessment of the great man is not without a certain accuracy: it can be extended to his conduct towards religions: Judaism, for him, is just a number, but it finds its place in his calculations.